

Message Text

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SUBJECT: RABIN-PERES CONTEST AND OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

REF: TEL AVIV 8651

1. A CRITICAL ASPECT OF THE LOOMING RABIN-PERES CONFRONTATION IS THE QUESTION OF WHICH LABOR PARTY FORUM WILL CHOOSE THE PARTY'S LEADER. THE FATE OF THE TWO CANDIDATES COULD HINGE ON THE ANSWER. THE ALTERNATIVES ARE: A) THE EXISTING CENTRAL COMMITTEE, ELECTED SOME SEVEN YEARS AGO; B) THE PARTY CONVENTION SCHEDULED TO OPEN FEBRUARY 22; AND C) THE NEW CENTRAL COMMITTEE TO BE ELECTED BY THE CONVENTION. ALSO CONSIDERED WAS THE POSSIBILITY THAT A LEADERSHIP BUREAU, A MORE RESTRICTED BODY THAN THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE, WOULD MAKE THE CHOICE IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE PARTY'S KNESSET CONTINGENT.

2. PRIOR TO THE CABINET CRISIS, AN ATTEMPT BY RABIN SUPPORTERS TO HAVE THE OLD CENTRAL COMMITTEE SETTLE THE MATTER RAN INTO STRONG OPPOSITION WITHIN THE PARTY AND WAS DROPPED. IMMEDIATELY

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FOLLOWING RABIN'S RESIGNATION AND WITH THE PROSPECT OF ELECTIONS IN MAY, THE PROPOSAL WAS REVIVED AND SEEMED TO BE GAINING ACCEPTANCE BASED ON THE ARGUMENT THAT THE PRESSURE OF TIME REQUIRED A DECISION BEFORE THE CONVENTION. IN THE LAST SEVERAL DAYS, HOWEVER, DEVELOPING PROTEST WITHIN THE PARTY APPEARS TO HAVE AGAIN TORPEDOED THE CHANCES OF AN EARLY CHOICE. FORCES LED BY ABBA EBAN, PARTY SECRETARY-GENERAL MEIR ZARMI AND SUPPORTERS OF PERES HAVE ARGUED THAT THE OLD CENTRAL COMMITTEE DOES NOT REPRESENT THE 80,000 NEW MEMBERS THAT HAVE

JOINED SINCE THAT COMMITTEE WAS ELECTED AND LEAVING THE CHOICE TO IT WOULD MAKE A MOCKERY OF THE PARTY'S COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRATIC PROCESS. PERES AND EBAN SEE THEIR PROSPECTS AS BETTER ON THE CONVENTION FLOOR OR WITH A NEW CENTRAL COMMITTEE.

3. ANOTHER OLD PROPOSAL WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE RABIN-PERES RIVALRY THAT HAS BEEN REVIVED IS THE SUGGESTION TO PERES THAT HE ABANDON THE CONTEST WITH RABIN IN EXCHANGE FOR A SECURE HOLD ON THE NUMBER TWO SPOT IN THE PARTY AND IN THE NEXT CABINET. WHEREAS THIS WAS REPORTEDLY PROPOSED TO PERES SEVERAL MONTHS AGO BY HOUSING MINISTER AVRAHAM OFER--AND REJECTED--IN ITS NEW GUISE THE PARTY WOULD CHOOSE ITS CANDIDATE FOR PRIME MINISTER (RABIN) AND NEXT A "LEADERSHIP GROUP" OF 15 IN RANK ORDER, FROM WHOM THE TOP MAN WOULD CHOOSE HIS CABINET SHOULD LABOR WIN. THE NEW OFFER DIFFERS FROM THE EARLIER ONE IN THAT TO AVOID A DECISIVE RABIN-PERES CONTEST THE GRATEFUL PARTY WOULD "DEMOCRATICALLY" GUARANTEE PERES THE NUMBER TWO POSITION. RABIN HAS CERTAINLY ALLOWED FOR THIS POSSIBILITY BY HIS STATED WILLINGNESS TO INCLUDE PERES IN HIS NEXT CABINET (TEL AVIV 8651). THE PRIME MINISTER HAS THUS REFRAINED (SO FAR) FROM USING ONE OF HIS STRONG WEAPONS, TO WIT, THAT HE WOULD NOT INCLUDE PERES IN THE NEXT CABINET IF PERES CHALLENGES HIM AND LOSES, NOR WOULD HE SERVE IN A PERES GOVERNMENT SHOULD PERES WIN SUCH A CONTEST. THE SECOND PART OF THIS EQUATION WOULD BE ENOUGH TO GIVE PAUSE TO MANY PRO-RABIN LABORITES WHO ARE WAIVERING IN THEIR CHOICE BECAUSE THEY CONCEDE THAT PERES IS A MORE ATTRACTIVE VOTE-LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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GETTER. THEY MIGHT SUPPORT PERES IF THEY WERE ASSURED THAT RABIN WOULD BE IN THE LATTER'S CABINET. AT THIS POINT, THE BETTING IS (SURPRISINGLY) EVEN ON WHETHER PERES WILL ABANDON HIS CHALLENGE. ONE OF THE EMBASSY'S SOURCES CLOSE TO PERES INSISTS HE WILL GO ALL THE WAY. ANOTHER SOURCE IS EQUALLY CONVINCED THAT PERES WILL ACCEPT THE OFFER AND NOT CONTEST RABIN.

4. MEANWHILE SIX BILLS FOR SCHEDULING EARLY ELECTION WERE PRESENTED TO THE KNESSET YESTERDAY. THE DATES RANGE FROM "AS SOON AS POSSIBLE--105 DAYS FROM ENACTMENT" TO MAY 31, WITH MAY 17 REMAINING THE ODDS ON FAVORITE.

5. AT THE MOMENT MOS OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT BOTH THE ALIGNMENT AND THE LIKUD WILL LOSE A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF SEATS. THE BIG GAINER IS FORECAST TO BE YIGAEI YADIN'S DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT FOR CHANGE, WITH THE MOST OPTIMISTIC PREDICTION GIVING HIM UP TO 25 SEATS. THIS IS PREDICATED ON HIS COMBINING WITH MOST OTHER LIBERAL-CENTER PARTIES INCLUDING SHARON'S NEW PARTY, SHLOMZION--BY NO MEANS A CERTAINTY. WHILE SUCH A STRONG SHOWING MAY NOT BE ENOUGH TO MAKE YADIN PRIME MINISTER IT WOULD IN ALL LIKELIHOOD GIVE HIM THE ROLE OF

KINGMAKER.RABIN REPORTEDLY WAS DISCOMFITED TO LEARN
YESTERDAY THAT THE TRIAL OF ASHER YADLIN, FORMER HEAD OF
KUPOT HOLIM (ISRAEL'S NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE), WILL START
ON FEBRUARY 1.WE HAVE BEEN INFORMED THAT THE PRIME MINISTER
FAILED TO CONSIDER THE YADLIN TRIAL (AND ITS POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES FOR SENIOR MEMBERS OF THE LABOR PARTY) IN HIS
DECISION TO ADVANCE THE KNESSET ELECTION. MEANWHILE, ABIN
IS STRIVING TO RETAIN THE MAPAMIN THE ALIGNMENT. HE SEEMS
PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE TO ABBA EBAN'S RECENT CHARGES THAT
HE (RABIN) CANNOT HET ALONG WITH PEOPLE OR PARTIES AND HAS
ALIENATED MANY ELEMENTS IN ISRAEL'S BODY POLITIC. HIS MOOD
COULD NOT HAVE BEEN IMPROVED BY THE ALIGNMENT'S DEFEAT (55-52)
IN THE KNESSET YESTERDAY ON A COMPULSORY ARBITRATION BILL.
WHILE LABOR MAY BE ABLE TO BATTLE THE BILL UP IN COMMITTEE,
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(WITH RAKAH SUPPORT) THE DEFEAT WAS NEVERTHELESS A HARBINGER
OF WHAT THE OPPOSITION CAN DO.

6. FINALLY, IF THINGS WERE NOT CONFUSED ENOUGH, RABBI MEIR
KAHANE, HEAD OF THE JEWISH DEFENSE LEAGUE, ANNOUNCED THAT HE
WOULD RUN FOR A KNESSET SEAT WITH, A HE CLAIMED, "MUCH
FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM CONTRIBUTORS ABROAD."
DUNNIGAN

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